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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by the Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre (Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

1. The achievement of a "culture of nature" in which human beings are the main beneficiaries and agents of social change, building a sustainable, rational and forward-looking world, was a guiding idea of Dr. Antonio Núñez Jiménez when he founded our organization in 1994.

2. Our Foundation is committed to helping Cuban society and the world solve environmental problems by integrating socio-cultural dimensions and has had a holistic view of how to address these social problems since its inception, as is evident from the thoughts of its founder: "We have come into being to fight for ecological values, to improve the health of the planet, which is sick from pollution (...) And we have also come into being to combat the contamination of humanity and the political disasters that in many places aim to make humanity a pariah in a third-rate world (...) We are fighting, in short, for humanity to thrive in a healthy environment."

3. The thematic area before us is another example of how difficult it is these days to consider this issue in isolation. It has been identified and placed on the political agenda of States by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which sets out the absolute need for "decent work" for all without linking this to analysis, scrutiny or a critical view of the prevailing policies at the macro and international levels in a

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neo-liberal globalized world. It is necessary to identify the adverse and restrictive impact of these policies, which tend to negate the possibility of access to "decent work" for ordinary citizens.

4. Sustainable development, social justice and decent employment are issues which actors from the trade union movement and civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean have drawn attention to because they are closely interlinked. Another noted cross-cutting issue involves upholding the principle of equality, which is commonly violated in the area of employment access, tenure and promotion owing to thousand year-old and latent prejudices still underpinned by sexism, racism or phobias based on ethnic origin, nationality or sexual orientation. Such prejudices are rooted in a "anti-nature culture", which is violent and essentially unsustainable for human development in the twenty-first century.

5. Designing policies, strategies and programmes aimed at ensuring access to "decent work" initially requires comprehensive measures which guarantee access to decent education. Moreover, this is possible only when people enjoy the right of universal access to primary health-care services, which treat curable diseases and allow people to live healthy lives. Only in this way, by building a socio-political climate devoid of egoism, which is the main ethical reason for the ecological and environmental disasters upon us, can we then gain time to create the better world that we want: a world where there are equal opportunities to develop the full potential of the human intellect for the benefit of our peoples and societies. This is our view of how the paradigm of access to "decent work" can be based on more equitable and far less disparate realities than today.

6. The Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity has a vision which aims to build a society where love and respect for nature are an intrinsic part of national identity at the local level, a vision which is respectful and cognizant of the responsibility that we have on a global scale as part of the planet as a whole. It has been involved in Cuba's overall efforts to create a more just, compassionate and worthy society for all, drawing upon a still imperfect social reality, a society that in its everyday work has moved from underdevelopment and is building development strategies and programmes that have achieved first-world standards.

7. Since the triumph of the Revolution, the much-criticized logic of "growth first, distribution later" has never prevailed in the design and implementation of our economic development strategies, not even in the most difficult times when many were betting that our social project would disintegrate following the demise of the socialist camp in Eastern Europe.

8. Even in the worst years of the "Special Period" following the collapse of the socialist camp, a time when the economic, financial and trade embargo imposed by the Government of the United States of America was stepped up, the right to work remained a central objective. This was the case during the arduous and complex process of working out how to downsize the Cuban economy in order to salvage and ensure the survival and very existence of our political model with the least possible impact on the social progress that had been successfully consolidated and that we all, as a people, enjoyed.

9. In addressing this subject, we also believe that there is an important need to further analyse the impact of the environmental factors which influence indicators for the attainment of decent work. Owing to underdevelopment or limited access to

cleaner production technologies, our countries continue to see human health being affected by polluted environments, a lack of job security and so forth.

10. Taking advantage of the framework provided by the commendable ideas of ILO and its call for our participation today as members of civil society, the Foundation would like to state that all the efforts that we are carrying out today in Cuba as an NGO — in conjunction with the various other civil society organizations in our country, and in their dual capacities as direct actors and beneficiaries providing support for programmes to achieve the strategies and programmes of action of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Rio Earth Summit and the Millennium Development Goals — are taking place in subhuman conditions since ours is the only country in the world whose people have been victimized for more than four decades by an economic war waged unilaterally and extraterritorially by a foreign Power — the United States of America.

11. Whatever efforts we make in our society today in Cuba, the situation continues to be characterized by this genocidal reality. However, our capacity to grow stronger and to look to the future is a legacy rooted in our historical memory, and we therefore wish to share common experiences and dreams in this social dialogue for a viable and dignified future.

12. The need to contribute to building a better world in this context, acting and drawing upon the rich and diverse knowledge that international civil society has accumulated with respect to thematic areas firmly on the political agenda of the Commission on Social Development, is a new challenge for the Foundation in its new capacity as an NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. This is a necessary apprenticeship, an acknowledgement of decade-long efforts and, above all, a commitment to the internal work carried out in our country to broaden and deepen the development of an extensive environmental culture, one where social issues and the development of our cultural values show the best contribution that human beings can make towards developing all aspects of our societies: cultural, scientific, social and economic.

13. We reaffirm our ethical commitment to building a culture of nature without poverty, illiteracy and unsanitary conditions based on the principle of respect for the full dignity of men and women. These are prerequisites conducive for socializing, constructing and consolidating a common vision of "decent work" as an effective and sustainable paradigm.

14. In the words of our national hero José Martí: "In this world there is only one inferior race: belonging to it are those who consult their own interests before all else, whether it be for their vanity, pride or material welfare. Likewise, there is only one superior race: belonging to it are those who consult the human interest before all else".[1]

[1] Mario A. Batista Zaldivar and Miguel A. Pupo Chacón. "You can live in Ecopoli". Year 12. No. 32, 2005. Quarterly journal published by the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity. Habana, Cuba. Page 25.